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## REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS OF LITERATURE

*Critical Realism: A Study of the Nature and Conditions of Knowledge.* ROY WOOD SELLARS. Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company. 1916. Pp. x + 283.

We are indebted to Professor Sellars for a keenly-argued and comprehensive treatment of epistemological problems. The merits of his book will, I venture to predict, meet with appreciative recognition from students of philosophy wherever it is read. The reader is impressed by the author's extensive acquaintance with the literature of the subject and by his critical acumen; if the constructive portion of the works fails of completeness it is only fair to assume that this will be made good, in accordance with the plan of the author, in subsequent volumes. The statement in the preface that the views developed in the book "are the summary of many years of teaching and of hard and pretty constant thinking" (while perhaps unnecessary) is not difficult of belief, and the theory of knowledge to which this protracted reflection has led is worthy of thoughtful consideration.

One notable merit of the book is its historic approach to the problem. The author refers to the agreement of Locke and Berkeley that if there is to be knowledge of the physical world it must be of the nature of direct or indirect apprehension. Either the physical world itself or a substitute copy must be present to the understanding when we think. But while he rejects the copy theory it is refreshing to find that the author does not regard the shortcomings of the copy theory as sufficient ground for returning to immediate realism. Rather the opposite: he holds that the absolute untenability of immediate realism leads inevitably to the copy theory, and that the final solution of the problem requires us to push forward that movement of critical reflection of which it is the first step.

Chapter I. is given to a discussion of the immediate or "natural" realism which holds that the physical thing itself is present to consciousness. Reflection upon experience soon discloses that the individual perceives only the appearances of the thing and not the thing itself. Science confirms this conclusion; it "unconsciously swings ever more completely away from the assumption that physical things are open to our inspection or that substitute copies are open to our inspection" (p. vi). Realism dominates in science, but idealistic motives increase. The situation is relieved by a temporary compromise: the percept is admitted to be mental, but is referred to a physical thing, its cause. The problem is still insistent and its solution requires the full development of the idealistic factor in experience. The facts which count in favor of idealism are presented in

Chapter III., "The Advance of the Personal," and the following four chapters are devoted to questions arising in connection with the idealistic reconstruction of experience. The conditions of perception are seen to be different with every individual and concepts to be developed under the influence of individual interests and purposes. Idealism is successful at least in proving that realism, if it is to be saved, must abandon the view that the physical object is immediately present to perception. Idealism shows that the dualism ordinarily recognized between mental and non-mental in perception is one within the unity of the mental as a whole; hence knowledge can not be a direct apprehension by the mind of the non-mental.

In Chapters VII. and VIII. the author passes from a criticism of idealism to a statement of his own view, that of mediate or critical realism. The error involved in idealism turns out to be the assumption that knowledge demands the presence of what is known. But because things which common sense assumes are present to the mind and at the same time non-mental prove to be mental, it in nowise follows that objects known and not present to the mind are likewise mental. "My thesis is then that idealism and realism have had essentially the same view of knowledge and that the large measure of sterility which has accompanied philosophical controversy is due to this constant assumption that knowledge always involves the presence of the existent known in the field of experience. Philosophy limited itself to a controversial study of the subject-object duality and did not lift its eyes to the triad consisting of subject, idea-object (in science analyzable into propositions) and physical existent. It is to this triad that critical realism calls attention" (Preface, vii). "The thing is absent while the idea is present. This idea may consist of propositions which are referred to the thing" (p. 150). Thus physical things are causally connected with percepts and help to control their development, but are not perceived. "What is perceived does not cause its own perception. But we are able to conceive this *absence-in-presence* of the physical thing by means of the distinction between the thing and the thought of it which we already possess. The presence-in-absence of thought makes thinkable the absence-in-presence of perception" (p. 129).

Very skilfully the author formulates his own view in connection with the historical development of epistemological theory; he is also remarkably successful in the effort which every thinker who chooses this approach must make, to prove that his own theory is the natural goal of the historical development, reconciling opposing views and including the truth to which each in its one-sided way does justice. But this is only the first part of his task. The second and more important is to work out with thoroughness his own view, demonstrating in some

detail that it solves the specific problems of the field. In this he has made only a beginning. The reader is particularly desirous of learning how the systematized concepts through which the subjectivity of perception is overcome and the thinker is made acquainted with independently existing reality, themselves gain objectivity. Some interesting suggestions are made in Chapter II. Individuals are not in a position to ascertain, we are told, how divergent their thing-experiences are, when these are derived from perception. Hence they are compelled to resort to tests of grouping and of arrangement in series. "Such tests rest upon, and are bound up with, movement, for which passive content is unimportant. The perception of movement is a perception of a relation or a successive series of relations. Hence we seek correspondence and not similarity. In other words, order dominates over passive quality" (p. 62). These statements are promising, and it is a pity that the author does not continue his investigations along this line. The only other suggestions as to the criteria of truth and objectivity are given in the last chapter on "Truth and Knowledge." Correspondence is admitted to be a genuine test, but limited to immediate experience. "At the level of mediate realism it is realized that such a comparison between physical existents and propositions which are supposed to contain knowledge is impossible. The test is immanent and concerns the harmony between data and propositions based on them according to inductive and deductive methods" (p. 282). Coherence, we are elsewhere told, is one of the criteria of truth, but not its universal sign. How then does reality exercise control over the propositions which claim to give knowledge of it? Is there a preestablished harmony between the system of ideas and the order of existence?

Instead of a further exposition of mediate realism we are given an attempted solution of the mind-body problem in a long chapter entitled "Is Consciousness Alien to the Physical?" Evidently the author attaches considerable importance to the view here set forth; he remarks in his preface: "I feel certain that the reader will find many parts of the chapter extremely interesting" (p. vii). (Of course, it is a matter of taste, but such a statement seems to me out of place in the preface to a scientific treatise. It reminds one too much of the "puffs" which magazine editors sometimes give to the contributions they publish.) The theory is in brief that consciousness is a "functional variant of the cortex" and "its unity is that of the integrative activity of the brain which it helps direct." Such statements (and this formula is repeated with variations of language) mean little or nothing without a very clear and thoroughgoing explanation. The statement that consciousness is a functional variant of the cortex is capable of radically mechanistic interpretation. Yet

evidently the author does not mean it to be thus understood, for he regards it as inconsistent with evolution to hold that nature is a dead-level system and says there is no adequate reason to deny that the physical world rises to the level of purposive activity. But if purpose enters the natural world as a directing agency it must bring with it a type of relation different from, and in a sense contrary to, the externality of mere mechanism. The author recognizes none such, however; he says there is no valid reason to deny that consciousness is an extended manifold and proposes as a name for his theory "Neo-Materialism." Chapter IX. is the least valuable and interesting part of an excellent book.

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*The Problem of Personality.* ERNEST NORTHFIELD MERRINGTON.  
London: Macmillan and Company, Limited. 1916. Pp. 220.

An attempt to show that personality must be accepted as the initial datum from which we may proceed to a statement of the fundamental truths of philosophy and theology forms the subject-matter of this book. The first part of the work, which is devoted to an exposition and criticism of recent British and American writers in whose theories the concept of the self has occupied an important place, serves as the background with reference to which the constructive part of the treatment is concerned.

We pass immediately to the crucial point of the argument. The concept of experience has been dangerously vague. A scrutiny of this concept discloses the fact that the subject-object is the primary datum involved in all experience. The author lightly dismisses the difficulty in the position that if the subject-object be the initial assumption then the same reality must be ascribed to the object as to the subject. The subject, it is asserted, is the permanent center of reference for a shifting circumference of objects. Moreover, the subject is not limited in experience to cognition; the self which feels is as much the subject in experience as the knower. Self, person, consciousness, and kindred concepts are discovered to be various phases of the subject—"The one for whom any set of experiences is." By way of comment on this position we can only reiterate that argument which claims the advantage for experience or immediacy as the initial datum in philosophical theory. Here experience is used advisedly to denote that vague, indefinite, unanalyzed context upon which a later reflection operates in making the distinction of subject and object. The self as subject is held to be coexistential with the object, both being analytically evolved from an original complex.